

---

---

## DESCRIPTIVE ADJECTIVES

An adjective is a word that modifies a noun or pronoun. If an adjective describes, it is called a descriptive or qualitative adjective.

C'est un partisan loyal.  
*He's a loyal follower.*

Elle est qualifiée.  
*She is qualified.*

In English, descriptive adjectives have only one form. French descriptive adjectives have four, since they usually agree in gender (masculine, feminine) and number (singular, plural) with the noun they modify.

	Masculine	Feminine
Singular:	un produit intéressant <i>an interesting product</i>	une affaire intéressante <i>an interesting deal</i>
Plural:	des produits intéressants <i>some interesting products</i>	des affaires intéressantes <i>some interesting deals</i>

### Formation of Adjectives

#### Formation of the feminine singular

1. Most adjectives form the feminine singular by adding an unaccented *e* to the masculine singular. If the masculine singular already ends in an unaccented *e*, the masculine and feminine singular are identical.

##### Masculine singular

compétent  
énergique

##### Feminine singular

compétente  
énergique

2. Some feminine singular endings are irregular.

change	masculine singular	feminine singular
x → se	ambitieux	ambitieuse
er → ère	cher	chère
f → ve	lucratif	lucrative
c → que	public	publique
g → gue	long	longue
eur → euse <sup>1</sup>	travailleur	travailleuse
	professionnel	professionnelle
	pareil	pareille
	ancien	ancienne
double the consonant + e	gras	grasse
	gros	grosse
	coquet <sup>2</sup>	coquette

3. Certain common adjectives have irregular feminine singular forms.

Masculine singular	Feminine singular
beau	belle
blanc	blanche
bon	bonne
doux	douce
favori	favorite
faux	fausse
fou	folle
frais	fraîche
franc	franche
gentil	gentille
malin	maligne
mou	molle
nouveau	nouvelle
sec	sèche
vieux	vieille

4. Five of the above adjectives have a second masculine singular form, used before nouns beginning with a vowel or mute *h*.

beau	bel
fou	fol
mou	mol
nouveau	nouvel
vieux	vieil

le vieux fonctionnaire  
*the old civil servant*

le vieil ouvrier  
*the old worker*

But these adjectives have only one form in the masculine plural.

les vieux fonctionnaires  
*the old civil servants*

les vieux ouvriers  
*the old workers*

## Formation of the plural

1. Most adjectives form the plural by adding *s* to the masculine or feminine singular.

Singular	Plural
un avocat célèbre <i>a well-known lawyer</i>	des avocats célèbres <i>some well-known lawyers</i>
une réforme importante <i>an important reform</i>	des réformes importantes <i>some important reforms</i>

2. Masculine singular adjectives with certain endings have irregular plurals.

change	masculine singular	masculine plural
x ( <i>no change</i> )	paresseux	paresseux
s ( <i>no change</i> )	gris	gris
eau → eaux	nouveau	nouveaux
al → aux	moral	moraux

The adjectives **banal**, **fatal**, **final**, and **naval** form the masculine plural by adding *s*.

## Position of Adjectives

### After the noun

In English, descriptive adjectives precede the noun they modify. In French, on the other hand, they usually follow the noun. Adjectives of color, religion, nationality, and class almost always follow the noun.

une usine grise  
*a gray factory*

la société bourgeoise  
*middle-class society*

une entreprise française  
*a French company*

l'avocat catholique  
*the Catholic lawyer*

Note that adjectives of nationality are not capitalized in French. Nouns of nationality, however, are capitalized: **un Français, une Russe, un Japonais.**

### Before the noun

1. Some short, common adjectives normally precede the noun.

autre	haut	nouveau
beau	jeune	petit
bon	joli	premier
grand	long	vieux
gros	mauvais	vilain

2. Certain adjectives have one meaning when they precede the noun and another when they follow it.

un ancien client <i>a former customer</i>	une usine ancienne <i>an old (or ancient) factory</i>
----------------------------------------------	----------------------------------------------------------

un brave citoyen <i>a (morally) good citizen</i>	un président brave <i>a courageous president</i>
-----------------------------------------------------	-----------------------------------------------------

un certain succès <sup>1</sup> <i>a degree of success</i>	un succès certain <i>a sure success</i>
--------------------------------------------------------------	--------------------------------------------

sa chère femme <i>his dear wife</i>	un ordinateur cher <i>an expensive computer</i>
----------------------------------------	----------------------------------------------------

le même jour <i>the same day</i>	le jour même <i>the very day (emphatic)</i>
-------------------------------------	------------------------------------------------

le pauvre type <i>the poor (unfortunate) guy</i>	un homme pauvre <i>a poor man (not rich)</i>
-----------------------------------------------------	-------------------------------------------------

son propre bureau <i>his own office</i>	un bureau propre <i>a clean office</i>
--------------------------------------------	-------------------------------------------

un simple ouvrier <i>a mere worker</i>	un homme simple <i>a simple man (plain, simple-minded)</i>
-------------------------------------------	---------------------------------------------------------------

le seul concurrent <i>the only competitor</i>	un voyageur seul <i>a traveler alone (by himself) (i.e., a lone traveler)</i>
--------------------------------------------------	----------------------------------------------------------------------------------

<sup>1</sup>As in English, **certain** before the noun can also mean "unspecified": **un certain homme**, a certain man (whom I could name if I wanted to).

notre dernier chèque      l'année dernière  
*our last check (in a series)      last year (the one just passed)*

la prochaine question      l'année prochaine  
*the next question (in a series)      next year (the one coming)*

3. Many descriptive adjectives that normally follow the noun may precede it for special emphasis. In this case the stress is on the adjective, which is often pronounced in a more emphatic tone of voice.

Une magnifique affaire!  
*A magnificent deal!*

Quel dangereux adversaire!  
*What a dangerous opponent!*

### Two adjectives with one noun

1. If one adjective usually precedes the noun and the other usually follows it, they are placed in their normal order.

Charles de Gaulle était un grand homme politique français.  
*Charles de Gaulle was a great French politician.*

2. If both adjectives normally precede the noun, both are placed either before or after the noun, joined by the conjunction **et**.

C'est une longue et belle histoire.  
C'est une histoire longue et belle.  
*It's a long and beautiful story.*

3. If both adjectives normally follow the noun, both are placed after it and joined by **et**.

C'est une secrétaire compétente et honnête.  
*She is a competent and honest secretary.*

### Two adjectives juxtaposed

Two adjectives may be juxtaposed if the first adjective describes a word group composed of the second adjective and the noun. Both adjectives are placed in their normal position before or after the noun.

Monique est une jolie jeune fille.  
*Monique is a pretty girl.*

Il essaie de comprendre le milieu politique américain.  
*He is trying to understand the American political scene.*

In the first example, **jolie** describes the word group **jeune fille**; in the second, **américain** applies to the word group **milieu politique**.

## Agreement of Adjectives

French adjectives generally agree in number (singular, plural) and gender (masculine, feminine) with the noun or pronoun they qualify.

les institutions sociales  
*social institutions*

la politique internationale  
*international politics*

Note that the adjective **demi** is invariable and joined to the noun by a hyphen when it precedes the noun, but that it agrees in gender with the noun when it comes after.

une demi-heure  
*a half hour*

BUT:

une heure et demie  
*an hour and a half*

## An adjective with more than one noun

An adjective that modifies more than one noun is plural. If the gender of the nouns is different, the masculine plural form of the adjective is used. If both nouns are of the same gender, the adjective is naturally in that gender.

une jeune fille et un garçon courageux  
*a courageous girl and boy*

les premières questions et réponses  
*the first questions and answers*

## Related Expressions

### **avoir l'air** + adjective

Elle a l'air content.  
*She looks happy.*

Elles ont l'air contentes.  
*They seem happy.*

The adjectives may agree with either the subject or the masculine noun **air**. In modern usage, agreement is made most often with the subject. When, as often happens, **d'être** is added to the expression, agreement is always with the subject.

Elles ont l'air d'être contentes.  
*They seem to be happy.*

### **rendre** + adjective

Le travail la rend heureuse.  
*Work makes her happy.*

Les réformes rendent la présidente anxieuse.  
*Reforms make the president anxious.*

The adjective agrees with the direct object of **rendre** (in the preceding examples, **la** and **la présidente**). Note that the verb **faire** is not used to translate the expression *make* + adjective.

## Exercices

- A. Marc et Yvette, deux employés de bureau, sont complètement différents l'un de l'autre. Marc est toujours dissatisfait, par exemple, et Yvette est satisfaite. Décrivez Yvette en employant les adjectifs de la colonne de droite selon le modèle.

**MODÈLE** Marc est malheureux.

*Yvette est heureuse.*

1. Marc est indiscret.
2. Marc est dur.
3. Marc est conservateur.
4. La carrière de Marc est ennuyeuse.
5. Marc est malhonnête.
6. Marc est paresseux.
7. Marc est incompetent.
8. La mémoire de Marc est courte.
9. Marc est immoral.
10. Marc est brusque.

doux  
honnête  
compétent  
poli  
long  
travailleur  
libéral  
moral  
discret  
intéressant



—*Nous sommes un couple parfait. Moi, je suis compétente et travailleuse, et toi, tu es incompetent et paresseux.*